

1938, July - Dec.

ON THE FRONTIER OF BRITISH GUIANA AND BRAZIL*Captain N. Carington Smith, R.E. PP. 40-54.*
Evening meeting of the Society, 9 May 1938.

However, it was not until 1930 that field work began. In the following year a commission, set up by the colony itself, met Brazilian and Venezuelan commissions at Roraima, the western trijunction point. This point was fixed and the survey of the Brazilian boundary was commenced.

On the west side of the colony the mountain plateau drops abruptly to the sand and clay belt in a rock escarpment 1000 feet high. The rivers draining the plateau and the foothills of the Roraima range plunge over this shelf in falls rarely equalled for height or beauty, the best known being the Kaiteur falls on the Potaro; there are many others, some higher, but none of such perfect proportions of volume and height.

p. 43

A camp was established at the head of deep water navigation at Hepsiba, 50 miles from the coast.

p. 45

The Courantyne contains two falls or large rapids so swift and high that their passage is impossible, one at Wonatobo and the other at King Frederick William.

p. 46

An airport was established at Wonatobo, the first major portage, and the journey from there to Aramatau Camp was reduced from the three weeks taken by boats, even under the most suitable conditions, to two hours and twenty minutes.

p. 49

The results accomplished in the first season's work were disappointing; base camp was established at King Frederick William falls and the trijunction party started up the river from there at the end of October. The Dutch and Brazilian sections were met at the source of the Kutari at the end of the year. The source of the Courantyne was decided upon and an astronomical fix obtained. A large concrete pillar was constructed there and suitably engraved. The Dutch then departed to the east along their boundary, while the British began to work westwards.

VITAL STORAGE

p. 49 (cont.)

In the meantime the second British party explored the Aramatau, marked its source and started to trace the boundary eastwards. Some idea of travelling speeds can be obtained from the progress of this party: Aramatau Camp was left on January 16, but the boundary was not reached until April 14. The Oronoque was explored and surveyed to within 10 miles of its source in preparation for the following season. Field work stopped in May, when survey parties returned to Georgetown for ten weeks, leaving fresh boats' crews to provision all camps during the high water. Base camp was moved to Oronoque. During the recess the British and Dutch sections placed pillars at the mouth of the Courantyne to mark the direction of the boundary through territorial waters.

In August 1936 the survey parties again took the field, but with a very different outlook. The international watershed was located at the source of the Oronoque by the beginning of September, and an astronomical pillar erected. The boundary was traced eastwards, and rapid progress made through a country of small lumpy hills 200 to 300 feet high, separated from one another by creeks and swamps.

p. 51

Over 85 miles of boundary were surveyed and marked eastwards from the source of the Oronoque during the season 1936-37. In the meantime the Brazilians progressed westwards from Aramatau source. At the beginning of the following season the cuts were joined and the British struck westwards from Oronoque source towards the head waters of the Essequibo. Next season ought to see the field work completed, and the surrender of this fascinating but rather trying part of the world once more to nature.

p. 54

As I knew that this Commission approaching its end, and as Major Papworth has assured me he was trying to get it finished before May 9, the day of this lecture, I sent him a cable in the middle of last week asking him if he could possibly report completion in time for this lecture. I have only this morning received the following reply: "Junction effected to-day with Brazilian reconnaissance parties. Expect completion May 10th."

That happy event will take place then to-morrow morning just at the time when I hope we are saying to ourselves at our breakfast tables what an extremely pleasant and interesting evening Captain Carington Smith has given us at the Royal Geographical Society to-night.